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CHAGALL

A SELECTION OF PAINTINGS FROM AMERICAN MUSEUMS AND PRIVATE COLLECTIONS / EXHIBITION MARCH AND APRIL 1958
GALERIE CHALETTE 1100 MADISON AVENUE NEW YORK 28

CHAGALL detests realistic art in all its forms. Any brute representation of things distresses him. He does not shun natural forms, however; on the contrary, he makes them his through the love he bears them; but by the same token he transforms and transfigures them; he brings out, he draws from them their own surreality, finding there the symbols of joy and life in their fullest spiritual vitality.

Impressionism, fauvism, cubism, "all these conceptions seemed too terrestrial to me," Chagall said, speaking of his first impressions when he arrived in Paris in 1910 (he was twenty). "It was necessary to change nature, not only materially and from without, but also from within. . . ."

From the very first his attention had been captivated by the Louvre, where Manet, Delacroix, and Courbet were revealed to him. "It was as if the gods stood in front of me." But in spite of the gods

he had still remained obstinately true to the deep tendencies of his own art, "a mad art perhaps, flaming quicksilver, blue soul shooting forth onto my canvasses. . . ."

* * *

Each of Chagall's canvasses—in its serenity, pictorial solidity, and infallible science of color—lives on the stir of poetry, I mean that poetry which is the soul of each and every work of art, and which calls for an assent, a response of our whole being, as every great work of art does. Poetry, in this sense, is the manifestation of a mysterious knowledge, an experience full of savor, which is born in the depths of the soul and seeks to fructify into a work, as the strength of the tree rises from the depths of its roots to the sky of its fruit. And it is, no doubt, because of this poetic experience where his work comes to life, that Chagall, who does not profess any dogmatic religion, finds it astonishing that it is possible for some to conceive of an art deprived of mysticism. "My heart calmed"—we read in the artist's invaluable confidences which make the fine book that Jacques Lassaigne wrote on him still finer—"my heart calmed when I looked at the icons by Rublev, our Cimabue. With him I was born to mysticism and religiosity."

Chagall will always love icons, but henceforth these icons will be the images of Christ which he himself will paint. There are quite a few of them in his work. The first one was, I believe, the "Crucifixion" of 1938. Sometimes Christ crucified is the central subject of the canvas, sometimes he appears in the most unexpected environment—now with the Virgin Mary, now with the painter himself. What the heart and the hand of Chagall are looking for is, I suppose, at one and the same time the symbol of the suffering of the world and the suffering of the Jewish people, and of the mystery of the Messiah.

* * *

A painting by Chagall is a presence which imposes itself even upon those who are deaf to poetry's voice. But to those who hear are told, through the very power of this art, a thousand dreams and

1949

mysteries which are, as it were, the secret network of the arterial tree of the work; they assure life, they express the ineffaceable images of childhood, the wishes of the heart, the joy of the eyes.

Chagall's surrealism is the liberation of his own inner world. The universe created by Chagall is in ignorance of hatred and discord; it utters grace and joy, fraternity and love. The suffering of the world is also present, under the sign of a grave and melancholy contemplation; but the symbols of consolation are always near at hand. The Chagallian world capsizes with pity.

The loving, spiritual joy in which Chagall's art is steeped was born with him in Vitebsk, on Russian soil, on Jewish soil. It is, then, imbued with melancholy and tears, run through by the dart of nostalgia and difficult hope. This joy resembles no other; I would say that, while it thrusts its roots deeply into the full reality of life, it draws therefrom, at the same time, the tragic feeling of its own frailty. Look only at the faces of Chagall's musicians, of his beggars, of his rabbis; they are faces eternally true, at once miraculously able to assert the happiness of life and to confront the executioner and death.

* * *

"Arriving in France I still had loam on the roots of my shoes. It takes a long time for this loam to dry and drop off. . . . When all the memories of Vitebsk vanished away (and they were real, palpitating signs which had nourished my soul so long) I was obliged to find something else . . ." "the landscapes of France, . . . Paris,"[1]—and those animals of La Fontaine (and of Chagall) in whom so sweet and profound a loving inspiration is alive, in an admirable plastic form. "To sum up," he wrote, "for what I succeeded in doing I am indebted to Paris, to France, whose atmosphere, men, and nature were for me the true school of my life and my art."[2]

I think that, in a general way—and taking into account the vital, creative influences which visible things exercised on the painter—we may discern two great epochs in Chagall's work.

1. Cf. Jacques Lassaigne, "Chagall," Paris, Maeght, 1957, p. 35.
2. Cf. Raïssa Maritain, "Chagall ou l'Orage Enchanté," Genève, Ed. des Trois Collines, 1948, p. 191.

The first epoch is under the sign of Vitebsk, with its humble life flooded with biblical wisdom and grandeur. At this time a particularly grave climate reigns over the work of Chagall. His figures live in poverty and carry greatness with them. His landscapes, in all their plastic freedom, are dominated by the character of the man who occupies them. In this first epoch the subject of the painting has, in a certain sense, more importance than in the following epoch.

This second epoch, which developed gradually over a period of twenty years or so, is marked by a definite predominance of Paris and France over the memories of Vitebsk. "Paris, you are my second Vitebsk!" Chagall had exclaimed when he was twenty. It was an astounding prevision of the new and almost limitless liberty to which, under the sky of the "new Vitebsk," he was to attain when the Russian loam at last dropped off his shoes. At that moment a veritable renewal of images appeared in Chagall's work. From France, Palestine, Greece, he had felt the impact of beauties free of human fate. His imagination and his gifts for transfiguration and abstraction had been stirred in their depths. It is in an airy and luminous world that his plastic forms now display life and joy with an extraordinary resplendence of color, while his experience of the infinite variety of nature expresses itself in a creative movement more independent than ever.

* * *

The present exhibition, gathering together many of Chagall's paintings from American museums or private collections, shows us what an ample and understanding response the art of Chagall has received in this country.

Raïssa Maritain

All drawings reproduced are from the Collection of Mrs. Joseph Opatoshu

THE CATALOGUE

To My Betrothed, 1911
Gouache. 24 x 17½
Philadelphia Museum of Art

I and My Village, 1911
Oil on Canvas. 23 x 18
Philadelphia Museum of Art

Temptation, 1911
Oil on Canvas. 63 3/16 x 44 7/8
City Art Museum of St. Louis

Over Vitebsk, 1914
Oil on Canvas. 26⅛ x 36½
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest

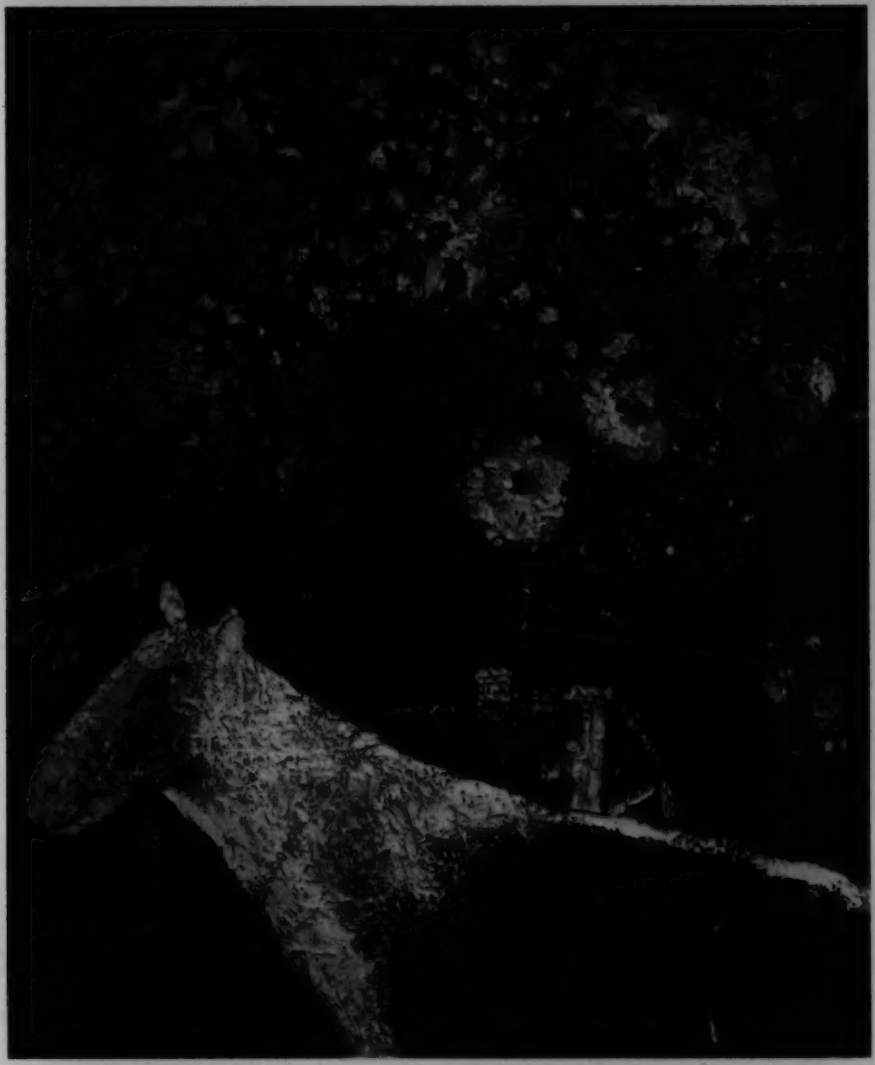
Feast Day. 1914
Oil on Canvas. 40 x 33
Mr. and Mrs. Himan Brown

The Acrobat, 1914
Oil on Canvas. 163/4 x 13
Room of Contemporary Art Collections,
Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo

Vitebsk from Zadunow Mountain, 1917
Oil on Canvas. 24 x 32
Mr. and Mrs. Perry R. Pease

The Acrobat, 1927
Gouache. 25¼ x 18
Mme Helena Rubinstein

The Peacock, ca. 1928
Gouache. 20 x 16
Mr. and Mrs. Albert List



Farm Scene, 1924
Oil on Canvas.
28¼ x 23½
Mr. and Mrs. Paul Sampliner

Man with Scroll, (undated)
Gouache. 17⅛ x 13
Mr. Boris Jaffé

Jacob's Ladder, ca. 1928
Gouache. 25½ x 18½
Mr. and Mrs. Albert A. List

Synagogue Interior-Wilna, 1935
Oil on Canvas. 24½ x 28½
Estate of Max Cottin

Synagogue Interior-Palestine, 1931
Oil on Canvas. 23 x 28½
Estate of Max Cottin

Flowers in a Dream,
ca. 1930
Oil, Pastel and Gouache.
27 x 20¾
Baltimore Museum of Art
Saidie A. May Collection

Phantasy in Blue, ca. 1938
Tempera. 21 x 27½
Mr. and Mrs. Henry R. Luce

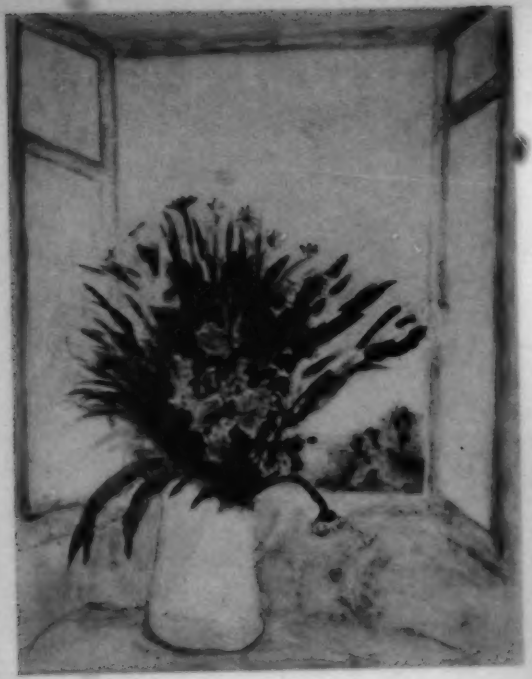
Bella as Madonna,
1945
Oil on Canvas. 49 x 39
Mr. and Mrs. H. Levin
Rensfield

The Flying Horse, 1945
Oil on Canvas. 28½ x 41
Mr. and Mrs. Harry N. Abrams

Cow With Umbrella, 1946
Oil on Canvas. 31 x 42
Mr. Richard Zeisler

Double Portrait, ca. 1936
Oil and Pastel on Canvas. 24¾ x 22
Mr. and Mrs. Albert List

Time is a River Without Banks, 1930-1939
Oil on Canvas. 39⅜ x 32
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Given anonymously

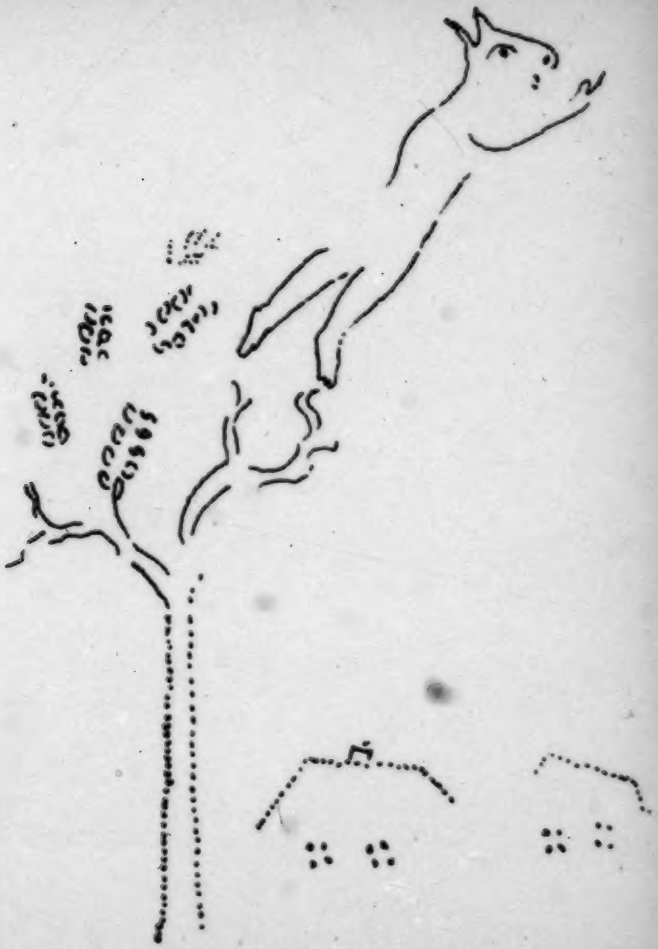


Flowers in a Window, 1948
Watercolor. 24⅛ x 19
Mr. and Mrs. Allen D. Emil

The Flying Fish, 1948 (*right*)
Oil on Canvas. 26 x 25½
Room of Contemporary Art Collections
Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo

The Clock, 1948
Oil on Canvas. 36½ x 28¾
Mr. and Mrs. Harry M. Abrams

Two Heads, 1950
Gouache.
21 x 18¾
Private Collection



Aleco. Scenery Design for Scene I, 1942
Gouache. 15 x 22
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest
(Not illustrated)

Aleco. Scenery Design for Scene II, 1942
Gouache. 15 x 22
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest
(Not illustrated)

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